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ABSTRACT

This final report of the Committee on the Future of the Card Catalog at the University of Virginia considers the evaluative reports of three task forces on the effects of AACR2 and recommends that the university library set as a top priority goal the design, development, and implementation of an online catalog by 1983. The committee further recommends that the library not close its catalog in 1981 but wait until the online catalog is in place. After 1981 the open catalog should include full two-way links between the old and the new headings. The library should move to become a member of the Research Libraries Group as soon as possible to ease the transition, and task forces to help cope with AACR2 should be appointed without delay. This report summarizes alternative courses of action open to the committee and the discussion leading to these recommendations. (Author/RAA)

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Committee on the Future of the Card Catalog

Final Report

27 November 1979

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ABSTRACT

The Committee on the Future of the Card Catalog recommends that the Library set as a top priority goal the design, development, and implementation of an online catalog by 1983. The Committee further recommends that the Library not close its catalog in 1981, but wait until the online catalog is in place. After 1981, the open catalog should include full, two-way links between old and new headings. The Library should also move to become a member of the Research Libraries Group (RLG) as soon as possible to help ease the transition to AACR2. Task forces to help cope with AACR2 and plan for an open catalog should be appointed without delay.

Introduction

In the summer of 1978, when the library profession as a whole was finally becoming aware of the soon-to-be-implemented revised cataloging rules known as AACR2, Ray W. Frantz, Jr., University Librarian, appointed a committee of library staff at the University of Virginia to study the effects of the new rules and to make recommendations on whether or not to close the catalogs of the University of Virginia Library when AACR2 went into effect.

After several preliminary meetings, the Committee presented a plan which recommended the formation of three task forces to study the various aspects of AACR2 and the catalog-closing question. The task forces were concerned with 1) technical considerations of a non-traditional catalog and costs of cataloging and catalog maintenance; 2) use of the catalog by patrons and staff; 3) technical processing implications of AACR2 and a closed catalog.

The reports which follow include the final Committee report and recommendations, as well as the three lengthy task force reports. The task force reports, written after extensive discussions and research during the period November, 1978, through June, 1979, provide a broad overview of both public services and technical services topics related to AACR2 and the closing of the catalog. It is hoped that the considerable time which we devoted to committee meetings, reading, and research will benefit others who are considering these questions.

Robert A. Seal
Director for Administrative
Services

PART I - DECISION ON CLOSING THE CATALOG

As with any difficult problem, there were no easy, clear-cut answers to the question of whether or not to close our card catalog in 1981. It was not just a matter of choosing between two simple alternatives, keeping the catalog open indefinitely or closing it off in 1981. The recommended alternative, which does have the unanimous support of the entire Committee, is in fact a combination of solutions, a compromise of the various interests represented, and the Committee feels that it is the best answer for the University of Virginia Library and for library staff and users.

The Committee's final recommendation actually consists of a first and second choice. We wish to note, however, that the first choice is, in our judgement, far preferable to the second alternative, and we strongly feel that everything should be done to meet the requirements of the first choice. The second choice is tolerable, although it will make life more difficult for the Cataloging Department.

Before reviewing the specific recommendation on the closing issue, however, a more important, long-range goal needs to be addressed in the context of the future of the card catalog. In particular, the Committee recommends that the Library make its top priority for the immediate future, the design, development, and implementation of an on-line catalog for Alderman and the branch libraries. Initially, the online catalog would be an add-on catalog to the old card catalog, but the Library's ultimate aim should be the total conversion of all cataloging records into machine readable format so that in the not-too-distant future there will be one unified online catalog. The card catalog, with all its problems and complexity, can then be discarded.

The Committee recommends that a target date of January 1, 1983 be set for the implementation of the online catalog, two years after the switch to AACR2. The Computer Center has said that because of other priorities such as the new circulation system it is unrealistic to expect implementation before 1983 or possibly even 1984. Several conditions must be met before the target date can be realized. First, funds must be found to support the initial equipment purchase for the system, disk storage, terminals, and other devices, and to operate the system on a daily basis. At the same time, the Library should put all its efforts in the next three years into converting as many catalog records to machine readable form as possible for use in the computer catalog.

The Committee is convinced that an online catalog offers the best solution for the long term for inputting, maintaining, and disseminating bibliographic information for the Library and its users. Maintenance of the catalog is made much easier. Labor intensive tasks such as filing, revising, and shifting cards are eliminated, and corrections, transfers, and updating holdings are made much easier.

Search capabilities are expanded and improved. No longer is the patron limited to the few traditional access points such as author, first word of a title, and so on. Boolean and title word searching become possible, as does displaying several entries simultaneously on a CRT. No longer is the catalog located in one place. Terminals placed throughout the Library and the University make access to materials much easier. At last, we can take the Library to the patron. It means a union catalog in every branch library. Researchers will no longer have to trek to Alderman to find out what another library has.

An online catalog is the only solution to curbing catalog costs and enhancing user access to the Library's important holdings. It is clear that the card catalog is doomed, and rightly so, because it is too costly and difficult to maintain, and is becoming less able to provide users access to information.

With this background in mind we can now turn to the important question of what is to be done from 1981 until 1983 or later when the online catalog is implemented. At a meeting in August, the Committee narrowed its choices to two, keep the catalog open until the online catalog is ready, or close the catalog and have an add-on card catalog until the online catalog is implemented. Both solutions have good and bad points. Keeping the catalog open is the better alternative for the patron and library staff member who must search the catalog in their work. With an add-on catalog it is often necessary to look in two places, while with a continued catalog it is necessary to look in only one place for most items. From the technical processing point of view, closing the catalog is the better solution because an add-on catalog means less authority work, an easier and smaller catalog to maintain, one set of cataloging rules, and the ability to discard the add-on card catalog easily when the online catalog becomes a reality.

The Committee, however, has decided to recommend that the catalog not be closed in 1981 when AACR2 goes into effect. The recommendation includes using full, two-way links between heading conflicts within the open catalog (there may be selected exceptions to this) so that the user will be able to locate all materials no matter how they are listed. Along with this approach, however, the Committee feels that it is extremely important that the Library join the Research Libraries Group (RLG) as soon as possible to make use of the RLIN

database and other systems such as acquisitions. The prerequisite of joining RLG will help offset the large increase in authority work resulting from keeping the catalog open until we have an online catalog. Features of the RLIN system such as easier searching, much better response time, the ability to access and manipulate our own holdings data, automatic computer searching of "not found" items, and automated authority control, will greatly offset the increased work resulting from the new rules with an open catalog.

Our second choice is to keep the catalog open without RLIN, based on the possibility that we may be unable to join RLG for financial or political reasons. As mentioned earlier, we consider this choice to be far inferior to the first alternative because, without the help of the RLIN system, it will be difficult, though not impossible, to cope with the changes. If we do not join RLG, the result will be fewer items processed due to slow response time from OCLC, continued difficulty in maintaining holdings records, and the increased authority work without automated authority control.

Keeping the catalog open was not the first choice of the two committee members from the Cataloging Department. Nevertheless, the compromise solution, closing, but not until we can have an online catalog, was a solution we all felt that the staff could live with. We hope that in retrospect it will have been the best solution, but any alternative will have its own problems for the staff and for the library patron. The following four points should clarify why the Committee chose to leave the catalog open.

1) The Committee recognizes the great difficulty in trying to maintain a complex catalog with several sets of rules and more than seven million cards. Too much time (16,000 hours) and money ($80,000) is currently being spent annually on filing alone, and these costs will increase significantly in the future if the catalog is kept open. Information is missed or completely lost because of errors and changing cataloging practices. Even if there were not a new set of rules to contend with, it would still be appropriate to consider closing the card catalog and replacing it with an online catalog to cut down on the labor intensive maintenance of the file and to make information more accessible to users.

2) A prime concern in the committee's work has been the user of the catalog, both patrons and internal staff, and how this group would be affected by closing the catalog or leaving it open. Studies by the Task Force on Catalog Usage and the Task Force on Cost Analysis and Technical Considerations showed that a split catalog would impose a great hardship on users in many instances. Library patrons, for example, would frequently have to search in at least two places when searching for a known item, and all the time when doing generalized subject and author searches, if the catalog was closed and an add-on catalog was created. Library staff, for example bibliography library assistants, would often have to look in two places when verifying an order or seeking bibliographic data. In the patron's case this situation would cause frustration and disenchantment with library service, and in the case of staff a great increase in work would result. Further, an examination of the

literature by the Task Force on Catalog Usage suggested that patrons either miss a second catalog entirely or ignore it even if they know about it because it means extra work and trouble.

Consequently, the Committee feels that splitting the catalog in 1981 and having an add-on catalog would be a disservice to the user. Granted, even with split files within an "open" catalog, the user will have to look in two places in some cases because of conflicts between old and new headings. But such occurrences should not be common for our users. A random sample of our catalog records indicate that conflicts will occur less than 15 percent of the time, and most of those conflicts will be for corporate entries which, as studies have shown, are generally avoided by library users.

Links will provide a guide for the patron for the cases in which users will have to look in more than one place in the catalog. The user study undertaken by the Task Force on Catalog Usage showed that the majority of users can recognize and make use of "see" and "see also" references. In short, the library patron searching for a known item, the most frequent type of catalog use, will not be confronted very often by a link, but when that situation does arise, in most cases it will not pose any great problem. Leaving the catalog open will be a great benefit to the user because it will only be necessary to search the catalog in more than one place less than 15 percent of the time, as opposed to a much higher rate for a split catalog.

3) Technical processing and user considerations seem to favor conflicting alternatives. Faced with this dilemma, the Committee has concluded that the catalog should be closed eventually, but because

an add-on catalog will be difficult for the user, the catalog should not be closed until the add-on module has a lot to offer for the user. In other words, if the new catalog is a great improvement over the old model, then the user will not be as frustrated as he might be if confronted with two card catalogs, one being quite small for a few years.

It is hoped that the on-line catalog of 1983 will contain 500,000 or more records when the system goes into operacion: 250,000 records from the 1975-81 OCLC pre-AACR2 era, 100,000 records from the 1981-83 post-AACR2 period, and possibly another 150,000 or more records resulting from various retrospective conversion projects such as circulation, rare books, Clemons Library, etc. Whether or not that will be possible will depend on the ability to use all records on our OCLC tapes, and how much time and money can be found for additional conversion efforts. In any case, the conversion of our shelflist should hold an equally high priority with the development of the online catalog, because without a large number of the machine readable records, the online catalog will be less than desirable.

The goal, then, is to provide the user with an add-on online catalog which will have so many records that it will be the first place to look when seeking information about a book in our collection. Since the circulation and Clemons conversions involve the adding of known high-use items to the catalog database, a patron will have a good chance of finding the item needed in the online catalog.

The entire retrospective conversion effort should give priority to converting records according to actual or expected use.

4) Finally, the Committee recognizes the burden which will be put upon the Cataloging Department by keeping the catalog open while trying to cope with the changes resulting from AACR2. Even closing the catalog would cause additional work because of the new cataloging rules, although not nearly as much. For this reason, closing is an attractive option for the Cataloging Department.

A likely result of the new rules and keeping the present catalog open for two or more years longer is a decrease in production. That is, fewer books will be cataloged because of increased authority work, in particular having to check every author and subject in the catalog before filing to determine if there is a conflict between an old and new heading. If a conflict is found, a link will have to be constructed from the new to the old form of heading and vice-versa to insure that the user finds everything he or she needs.

The Committee understands the dilemma faced by the Cataloging Department and would like to emphasize the need for all staff to be aware of the potential decrease in the number of titles processed. It will be necessary to examine and possibly alter present routines to help cope with the added work. But new routines may not be enough, and for that reason the Committee strongly urges that steps be taken to join RLG as soon as possible. As mentioned on page 4 of this report, the system features of the RLIN system will be a big help to the Cataloging Department in trying to cope with the

new rules and an open catalog. If RLG membership cannot be attained by 1981 or sooner, then the secondary recommendation of remaining open without RLIN could be difficult, though not impossible.

A final word is in order. The above recommendations hinge on the assumption that an online catalog will be a reality by 1983 or 1984. The Committee wishes to underscore that a number of factors could delay the implentation of such a system until 1985 or 1986 or later. Certainly the problem is not a technical one; an online catalog is feasible in 1979.

Hopefully the design and development of the online catalog can begin in 1981 after the completion of the Library's automated circulation system. First, however, approval for the project must be gained from the University and from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Next, a large sum of money will need to be appropriated to purchase equipment and to operate the system. None of these steps is likely to be easy. The Library must be able to justify the need for an online catalog, convincing those persons in authority who will make a final decision.

We are convinced that the online catalog must be implemented by 1983 or 1984. It is vital for the Library and its users to have a vastly improved catalog to access the Library's important collections and to ease the growing cost of technical processing. The Cataloging Department would be able to manage longer than two years without the online catalog, but as time passes, the job of processing will become more and more difficult. The Library should move now to implement a plan for the future of the catalog and its users.

PART II - RELATED QUESTIONS

Although the question of whether or not to close the card catalog in 1981 was the central issue being considered by the Committee, several related questions were also addressed in the course of the Committee's work. This section of the report examines those questions and attempts to provide answers where possible.

1) Branch libraries. Foremost in the minds of branch librarians was the question of whether or not each branch library would have to follow the decision made for Alderman. For example, if Alderman decided to close, could a given departmental library keep its catalog open? However, since most branch libraries supported the idea that the catalog should remain open until we can go online, the problem no longer exists.

Where there might remain a difference of opinion, however, is in the method of maintaining the catalog after January 1, 1981. For example, although it is possible to create links between all conflicting forms of headings, it is also possible to make exceptions to this rule. Indeed, Alderman may decide to interfile cards for the same author with a full form of the name under the old rules (e.g. John A. Smith) and initials under AACR2 (J. A. Smith). Other exceptions to 100 percent linking are possible.

It is possible, then, that branch libraries may wish to deviate from the guidelines yet to be set by Alderman, for example interfiling variant forms of a name (e.g. Chaĭkovskiĭ, Petr Il'ich with Tchaikowsky, Peter Illich), something Alderman is unlikely to do. Although this may indeed be desirable in certain situations in selected department libraries, the Committee believes that any variation from Alderman practice must not be permitted. Consistency is necessary for two reasons. First, AACR2 will generate a great deal of authority work for the Cataloging Department, and it will be impossible to provide customized links and cross-reference "profiles" for each branch library.

Further, if several libraries follow different practices of interfiling, cross-references, etc., then the library patron who uses more than one library will not be well served. Confusion and frustration will surely result.

2) Serials. Keeping the catalog open poses unique problems for the Serials Cataloging Section. Under AACR2, serials will have more title main entries as the rules allow corporate main entry in fewer situations than did the old rules. Since the Official Serials Catalog (OSC) does not contain corporate body added entries, it may be necessary either to insert many new cross references or to begin creating corporate body added entries on a routine basis for the serials catalog. This issue, as well as the question of whether or not to create corporate body added entries for existing titles, is something that should be decided during the implementation phase of AACR2.

Several other important questions remain. For example, should the Library embark on a massive serials conversion project? If so, how does such a conversion fit in with plans for a new state union list, cooperative projects with VPI, and other programs? If conversion is done, should the many titles with only scattered holdings be weeded in lieu of recataloging? Should the current periodicals list be expanded to include all serials and all holdings? What priorities and procedures should be set for the actual conversion program?

Another question to be answered in the future of serials is that of holdings. Does the patron or librarian need complete holdings in all cases, or could holdings be abbreviated? Where should holdings information be located, in the OSC alone, or also in the Public Catalog? These issues and more will have to be resolved during implementation after a detailed and careful study of all the issues involved.

3) Non-Roman alphabets. Early on in the Committee's work when an add-on microform catalog seemed a real possibility, there was great concern about how materials printed in non-Roman scripts would be handled. However, since the Committee now recommends keeping the catalog open until we can go online, the issue of non-Roman materials is not as pressing. Cards for these materials can continue to be filed into the open catalog with no special problems for library staff and users.

This does not mean that the question will go away, however. It is only being tabled until nearer the time when an online catalog with microfiche backup is a reality. Besides computer advances which will eventually allow the automated processing of some non-Roman scripts, the biggest factor affecting decisions in this area is the Library of Congress. LC has already decided for the present to enter all non-Roman languages except Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, and Yiddish into its computer file in transliterated format. Titles in these languages will continue to appear in the traditional card format. Since decisions by LC in this area seem to change from day to day, it is impossible to predict future developments along these lines. In summary, the Committee recognizes that this issue has not yet been settled and that further study, perhaps in 1981 or 1982, will be necessary.

4) Rare books. The only comment that the Committee wishes to make regarding rare books cataloging is that the question of acceptance of AACR2 (or AACR for that matter) for processing rare materials needs to be given further consideration. The Committee notes that extra work results from cataloging rare books one way for OCLC and another way, i.e. in more detail, for our own local use. To some, this practice seems wasteful and inefficient. Consequently, this issue should be studied further and a decision made by the Library administration as to whether or not this practice should continue. Further, the Committee supports the notion that rare books holdings should continue to be represented in the main catalog.

5) Links. The Committee feels strongly that if the catalog stays open, then links are mandatory in order to help the patron find materials under variant forms of a personal name, a corporate name, or a subject heading. At the same time, the Committee believes that certain exceptions can be made to using links in all cases. Examples of this might be recataloging small files instead of creating links, interfiling full forms of a personal name with initials, etc. However, the Committee supports such procedures only if they do not critically detract from either the user's ability to locate material or from the Cataloging Department's ability to maintain the catalog. The Committee is not making any recommendations regarding what steps might be taken. Such decisions will be made during implementation.

The Committee also supports the notion that for the first year under AACR2, all name and subject headings should be checked for conflicts before filing. Hopefully, though, this extra step can be de-emphasized or eliminated after a year's experience with using the new rules.

Authority work, the making of links and cross-references, will be greatly affected by decisions made by OCLC, and whether or not the Library decides to join RLIN. For example, if authority records are made available online through OCLC or RLIN, some of the checking and verification can be simplified. Interactive authority control, the checking by the computer to see if a heading is correct, would further help the situation. Unfortunately, no one knows yet to what extent authority help will be available in 1981 from OCLC or RLIN. Although RLIN presently maintains some authority records of its own, both have promised online LC authority records by the end of 1980, but details are not yet known. For this reason, decisions on linking and other routines can not be made until more definite information is received from OCLC and RLIN.

6) Miscellaneous. The following additional issues were raised during the Committee's work, but were not addressed in depth because they were felt to be more appropriately part of the implementation procedure or even outside of the Committee's specific assignment. They are all important issues which should be given serious consideration in the near future. The questions fall into two general categories: materials which are not now represented in the Public Catalog, and materials which are represented, but which need expansion of the bibliographic data.

In the former category, should government documents be selectively or completely included in the card catalog? Should manuscripts collections be included as well? In the latter group, should science subject headings be reinstated for the Alderman Public Catalog? Should the subject heading "--Periodicals" be reinstated? Should subject heading cards have complete bibliographic data, even if it means many continuation cards and more expense? It is possible that separate committees should be appointed to study these issues, or perhaps some questions might be considered by the implementation task forces. In any case, these topics should not be neglected.

PART III - IMPLEMENTATION

Although a continued catalog will cause fewer implementation problems than an add-on catalog might, there remains a substantial amount of preparation in anticipation of January 1, 1981. The Committee recommends that Task Forces be appointed as soon as possible to begin planning for the changes resulting from the new cataloging rules and a continued catalog. The task force approach was used with great success in the study phase of the Committee's work, and we feel that it should be continued.

Unfortunately, plans for implementation cannot be completed overnight, and probably not within the next six months. Some work and discussion can take place now, and should, but it will be several months before final answers can be found. The reason for this delay is uncertainty regarding how the Library of Congress and OCLC will solve problems such as authority control, conflicting headings, and links. Since our Library, and most others in the United States, depends heavily on LC for cataloging copy and OCLC for automated cataloging, the actions of those two institutions greatly affect what implementation decisions we must make.

In particular, we are waiting for answers to the following: Will OCLC or RLIN permit entry of pre-1981 cataloging copy as is rather than upgrading it to AACR2? Will these utilities upgrade pre-AACR2 entries to conform with the new rules? If so, when will this occur and to what extent? Both have promised online access to LC name and subject authority records, but when will that occur? When will automatic authority control be a reality? Will OCLC refine search techniques to eliminate dead-end searches for multiple responses? Will the 35,000 links/authority records from LC be available on time? How extensively will we be able to use them? To what extent will the Library of Congress follow AACR2?

In short, we can make general statements and do some preliminary planning for January 1981 right now, but until we have the answers to the preceding questions, we cannot finalize all routines and changes related to AACR2 and a continued catalog. On the other hand, the Committee believes it would be a mistake to do nothing until we hear from OCLC and LC.

Finally, implementation is not a one-time event. It is certain that various changes will be made throughout the first year or two as we gain more experience in dealing with AACR2 and a continued catalog. Therefore, the implementation task forces should not be disbanded on January 1, 1981, but rather should stay in effect for as long as is deemed necessary.